

Memorandum

TO: Board of County Commissioners, Ravalli County

FROM: Stewart Brandborg
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SUBJECT: Status of Countywide Zoning Project

DATE: June 4, 2008

During the past three months, we have met informally several times to discuss the countywide zoning project. With the assistance of the Public Policy Research Institute, we have built a sense of respect and a common understanding of each other's interests and perspectives. Based on our conversations to date, we have come to the following conclusions:

1. We believe that countwide zoning can be an effective tool (not the only one) to support a vision we share in common for the future of the Bitterroot Valley. Our vision is defined, in part, by the following points:
 - a. Accommodate the inevitable growth of the valley.
 - b. Provide a desirable and predicable growth pattern in the valley.
 - c. Respect private property rights.
 - d. Sustain a viable farming and ranching community; a building and development industry; conservation values such as open space, wildlife corridors, and recreation areas; and the quality and character of the valley itself.
2. The countywide zoning project is going too far too quickly, and is more complex than is necessary or desirable. Many people throughout the county who represent diverse interests and viewpoints are frustrated and seem to have little or no faith in the process. Therefore, some key stakeholders appear to be "opting out" of the process, jeopardizing the success of developing broad-based support of county-wide zoning.

3. Although the CPCs provide an excellent opportunity for public participation, there is no countywide forum to integrate the diverse interests of residents.
4. The initial products from Clarion Associates - including Draft B of the zoning regulations and the first draft of the maps - do not accurately reflect the input and advice of either the CPCs or various stakeholder groups.

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, we offer the following recommendations on how to move forward:

- A. We recommend that it is more important to have a quality product than to complete this project according to the existing schedule. There is simply too much at stake in terms of the future of the valley, as well as the social and political capacity of residents to solve these types of problems, to continue on the current path. We are not necessarily recommending that you extend the time frame or deadline for the project (although that may be necessary), but to adjust the process at this point to make it more effective. We offer some recommendations below on how this might be done.
- B. We recommend that the scope of the proposed zoning regulations be much more limited than the current draft, which is far too complex and includes provisions that are unnecessary in Ravalli County. We recommend that the zoning regulations and maps be simplified by focusing primarily on land use and density, and include mention of height and setbacks at the minimum level required by state law.

We also recommend postponing the discussion of other issues to a later, specified date. This will allow the county to observe what works with the base layer of zoning and what needs further attention *before* the county embarks on another planning project that builds on the base layer of zoning. Limiting the scope of the regulations in this way may also allow us/you to get something in place by the November deadline, and recognizes that land use planning and growth management is an ongoing process.

- C. We recommend that higher density, including cluster development, in and around existing communities and infrastructure should be more strongly encouraged than is currently shown on Draft 1 zoning maps.
- D. During the coming weeks, we plan to work together to integrate diverse interests including but not limited to the recommendations of the CPCs, the position paper of the Right to Farm and Ranch Board, the maps of the

building and development industry, the map produced by the conservation community, and so on. We plan to focus on both the draft regulations and the draft maps. Our hope is to reconcile different points of view and ensure that the input and advice of various groups is accurately reflected in the next draft of the zoning regulations and maps.

We believe that the success of our working group to date is due to the fact that it is homegrown - which is to say that we created the group ourselves, reaching out to recognized leaders that not only represent diverse viewpoints, but are reasonable people committed to solving common problems.

We also recommend that, to the extent possible, the Public Policy Research Institute continue to convene and facilitate these meetings.

- E. We recommend that the Board of County Commissioners demonstrate their commitment to have a quality product, not just get it done, by speaking with one voice through either a resolution, letter to the editor, or other appropriate public announcement. Part of this commitment includes recognition that the current timeline may need adjustment to allow for diligent efforts to produce a quality proposal, and this commitment includes some guarantee that last minute changes made without public input will not be considered by the commissioners for adoption. If you can not make this commitment, for whatever reason, we would like a response within a week of delivery of this memo explaining what makes that commitment impossible.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. We would be happy to discuss these recommendations with you at your earliest convenience.